

1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.

The practice proposed for recognition as a *Best Practice* is a social studies project entitled *Our City, USA* in which first grade students essentially create their own community. *Our City, USA* is designed to provide an opportunity for students to develop an understanding of the important individuals and groups who work in a city or town and how these individuals and groups interact with one another to form a viable and supportive community. In keeping with the principles of developmentally appropriate practice for young children the program is designed to take into consideration the varying needs, interests and abilities of first grade students. This hands-on unit of study begins by brainstorming with students the things they already know about cities and towns and moves them through a logical sequence of learning activities, which includes identifying community workers, researching their roles, and exploring the ways in which they interact with one another. The project comes to life by students choosing a profession to role-play as part of a class video titled *Our City, Our Community*. For the video, each student writes and presents a speech explaining the duties of his/her job. Costumes and props add to the realism. Students also create a three-dimensional model of the city, which also becomes part of the video. The message that comes through in the video is that it takes the cooperative efforts of each and every worker to build a strong community.

The following objectives are met through completion of this project:

Students will demonstrate:

- an understanding that jobs are important within a community.
- the ability to categorize jobs according to their responsibilities.
- an understanding of various jobs through identification and discussion of the tools, clothing, and facilities necessary to perform them.
- the ability to utilize a variety of resources to access information including interviews, non-fiction books, videos, and the Internet.
- the ability to write a description of a community helper.
- the ability to speak in front of a group.
- the ability to apply knowledge of their particular community helper to create a model of a building.
- the ability to use measurement and estimation skills in the planning and construction of their buildings and model city.
- the ability to work cooperatively with their peers to plan and create a model city.

The practice is innovative in that it is an interdisciplinary approach to learning. While learning fundamental social studies concepts, the students are given opportunities to hone and apply emerging language arts skills. They also utilize math skills in the planning and construction of their buildings and model city. The project addresses a variety of learning modalities as students discuss, read, write, role play, speak before a group, and build their model city. When the video is complete, students are given the opportunity to view and critique their own performance. They also take turns bringing the video home to view it with family members fostering a strong home-school connection.

The practice promotes high student achievement because it incorporates learning activities that are hands-on, meaningful, and relevant to their lives. The natural curiosity and desire to understand and make sense of their world motivates these young students. The role-playing activity and building of the model city incorporate an element of play, which is so important as a vehicle for learning at this age. Active participation on the part of all students from start to finish ensures that all students are

involved in each part of the project. Students are provided with opportunities and materials to work at each level of Bloom's Taxonomy. They learn basic facts and work through a logical sequence of learning activities, which involves analysis and application of knowledge, synthesis and evaluation.

2. List the specific **Core Curriculum Content Standards**, including **Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards**, addressed by the practice and describe how the practice address those standard(s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.

The following Core Curriculum Content Standards and Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standards are addressed by the *Our City, USA* project:

Core Curriculum Content Standards:

Standard 3.1 All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences.

- Students write a speech they will read or present from memory.
- Students participate in discussions to identify community workers and explore their roles.
- Students present their speeches to classmates while being videotaped.
- Students use costumes and props to support their spoken messages.

Standard 3.3 All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.

- Students write speeches to inform others about the role of their chosen community worker.
- Students participate in brainstorming activities, list community workers, and discuss and categorize their roles.
- Students synthesize information from a variety of sources as they write their speeches.

Standard 4.4 All students will develop an understanding of and will use measurement to describe and analyze phenomena

- Students use and describe measures of length in building their model city.
- Students begin to understand and incorporate estimation and repeated measures in building their model city.

Standard 6.6 All students will acquire historical understanding of economic forces, ideas, and institutions throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world.

- Students learn about and describe the work that people do in our economic system.

Standard 6.7 All students will acquire geographical understanding by studying the world in spatial terms.

- Through the building of the model city, students begin to understand location, distance, direction, and scale.

Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standard:

Standard 4 All students will demonstrate self-management skills.

- Students work cooperatively to plan and build the model city.
- Students learn and use basic study skills through researching their community workers to expand their knowledge and skills.

3. Describe the educational needs of the students that the project addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met these needs.

The project was designed to address first grade social studies curriculum objectives in a developmentally appropriate way. Young children learn best through active involvement with their physical and social environments. Therefore each step of the *Our City, USA* project is designed to maximize the involvement of first grade students by providing for them an authentic learning experience that takes into consideration the wide variety of interests and abilities that exist within a first grade classroom.

Students participate in a brainstorming session prior to beginning the project. A KWL (*Know, Want to Know, Learned*) chart is created to assess the students' understanding of workers, their roles, and how they cooperate as a community. The project as a whole is evaluated based on the attainment of the learning objectives identified through this process. Through class discussions and conferences with individual students, the teacher is able to assess understanding of general concepts. Experience has shown that student understanding regularly extends beyond these initial objectives.

Students are further assessed using the rubrics shown below, and while all students have achieved a score of at least two on each rubric, the majority has achieved the highest score, completing the project with much enthusiasm. The teacher to assess each student in his/her ability to complete the project uses the first rubric. Students and teacher together use the second rubric to assess individual presentation skills.

Project Rubric

	1	2	3
Choice of Worker	Unable to identify/choose worker	Chooses a worker with help	Independently chooses worker
Identification of Characteristics	Identifies one characteristic	Identifies two characteristics	Identifies three or more characteristics
Written Report	Completes one sentence	Completes two sentences	Completes three or more sentences
Prop and Costumes	Prop and costume do not identify worker	Prop and costume are somewhat identifiable	Prop and costume clearly identify worker
Model	Model does not correspond with worker	Model is somewhat identifiable	Model clearly corresponds with worker

	1	2	3
Quality of Voice	Speech cannot be heard	Most words of speech can be heard	Each word of speech can be heard
Quality of Delivery	Speech cannot be understood	Most words can be understood	Each word of speech can be understood
Body Stance and Eye Contact	Moves off mark and face cannot be seen	Stays on mark and part of face can be seen	Stays on mark and looks straight at camera
Use of Props	Forgets to use props	Uses prop without discussing its purpose	Uses prop and discusses its purpose

4. Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school or district.

The practice can be replicated by first having students gain an understanding of their own community through a walking or bus tour. This real life connection helps students to brainstorm jobs that are important in a community. Students then choose a job and begin the process of gathering information by interviewing people, using non-fiction books and the Internet, and viewing videos. Time during the school day is provided for this and parents are informed about the project so they may help at home. Students write down ideas, discuss and analyze their ideas, and write a speech about their specific community member. The student "becomes" the community worker by identifying and creating or collecting props for role-playing. The students then create a three-dimensional community map. The culminating activity is the creation of a video called *Our City, Our Community*. The video consists of the students presenting their speeches complete with costumes and props and an aerial view of the model city. Once the video is completed, each student has an opportunity to take it home to view it with his/her family. The video becomes part of the classroom library and the project a powerful learning experience about individuals working together as a community.

The project can easily be adapted to suit students in Grades 2-5, with goals and objectives being adjusted to correspond with grade level expectations. The project model itself could be used at any grade level in the exploration of many other concepts, particularly, in the areas of social studies and science, by first identifying a key concept and grade level objectives, creating a KWL chart, and involving students in the research and development of a final product in which they demonstrate understanding of the key components of the learning. Through active involvement and ownership of the project, students achieve an in-depth understanding of objectives and participate in a meaningful and memorable learning experience.